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The Dialectic of Emotion in New Wave Cinema

Raymond Durnat, in his monograph on the New Wave directors,¹ stigmatizes their films as characterized by emotional "dryness," but this remark does not do justice to the passionate concern for the status of the emotional life that pervades the films of Resnais or Varda or Truffaut or Godard. Yet what is "emotion?" Where is it located in the films and how is it conveyed? Emotion in these films is problematical and this concept, the most contested in all of modern psychology, cannot be assigned an unequivocal valence in the work.

One theory of emotion sees it as motive force.² Emotions are seen as arousing, sustaining, and directing activity. So that in this view we might see the generating emotion of the film as inhering in the director and actors who, by organizing and channelling their emotions, contribute them to the characters and the audience. The characters serve as nodal points around which there accumulates a cathexis or emotional charge which is channelled outward so that it dominates the response of the viewer to the film. Seeing emotion therefore as an organizing force, which creates centers of meaning and value, we would find that the acts of emotional organization that originate in the director and the actors structure the interrelationship of all those who participate, whether actively or passively, in the creation and re-creation of the film.

The New Wave directors deal with the precariousness of emotion and with the substitutes and disguises for authentic emotional life that arise out of human interaction. They test emotion and question its validity by their portrayal of character and, at the same time, they force the viewer to re-evaluate his own immediate critical response to the work. These directors

share a profound scepticism about the values of bourgeois life, in particular those values that structure our intimate relations; it would not be wrong to see the New Wave movement as a critique of the emotions and an attempt to instruct film viewers in ways of rethinking the emotional dimension of their own lives.

This article treats the emotional concerns of New Wave films by dealing with a number of basic polarities; no single definition of emotion is seen as pre-emptive, but rather a number of different definitions are used as schemas for the interpretation of films. My aim is to sketch a phenomenology of the emotions, presented through the analysis of specific films, which answers at least in part the questions: where is emotion located? how is it conveyed? And the larger question—how can cinematographic emotion be described? With its strongly accentuated corollary qualities of intimacy and distance, the New Wave seems to lend itself admirably to this effort.

THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE USES OF EMOTION

The positive emotions all express appetency, the desire of a subject for an object. They include love, tenderness, desire, etc., and create by their expression a mood of intimacy. Films have always dealt with the intense personal relationships of individuals, that is to say intimacy; but New Wave cinema treats intimacy, and its opposite, distance, in a unique way. It attempts to isolate the moments of intimacy, to set them off and make them thematic; it focusses on the dialectic between intimacy and distance, showing how they conjugate each other; it uses intimacy as the dominant feeling-tone of its films. This is not to say that other directors have not

DIALECTIC OF EMOTION

given us a cinema of intimacy; but its role, for the New Wave, is always a central one, pointing to an historical crisis in human relations which is typical of France in the sixties. Scepticism about love, a downgrading of the concept of the person and, even more crucial, the explosion of the concept of self are themes that challenge the traditional belief in the supreme value of intersubjectivity. From this historical matrix there emerges the intimacy-distance dialectic of New Wave cinema.

Intimacy occurs whenever we remark the openness of one person to another in those films in which people give, share, reveal themselves to each other in a positive way. This may be the casual intimacy of undressing for bed together, as in Godard's *The Married Woman* or in his *Masculine-Feminine* where we see characters in the Metro or in cafés huddle together to exchange their human warmth and a flicker of urgent emotion. The Rhineland chalet where Jim visits Jules and Catherine in Truffaut's film is also a place characterized by intimacy as is the more sensual studio in *Two English Girls*. But more intimate than any of these is Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* where we experience a more total sharing and gift of self—even though it is, in the end, inconclusive.

Through both the script of Duras and the directing of Resnais we experience in the film the effort to communicate a shifting emotional relationship, one that is centered around the experience of intimacy with all the decisive power that term implies. For intimacy once experienced leaves a permanent impress on the psyche; the two characters, Hiroshima and Nevers, are marked deeply by their affair and must struggle to come to terms with it, to somehow spell out the new vision of life the affair gives them.

The story belongs essentially to the Frenchwoman, Nevers. Her intimacy with the Japanese, Hiroshima, unlocks the experience of her first love, with a German soldier during the Occupation, and the two experiences coalesce, overwhelming her with feelings of tenderness and fears of that tenderness which makes her vulnerable. Intimacy is imperious and so always a threat to the existing pattern of life (in her



HIROSHIMA, MON AMOUR

case husband and children as well as her career). Intimacy is fragile, improbable, always threatened, yet it has a power of subversion that overcomes the obstacle of rational plans and empirical aims. The two characters are mature, no longer youthful, and so they realize the great value of intimacy even when transient, even when doomed to renunciation. They realize that within intimacy a profound zone of the self, perhaps that zone which makes us most ourselves, comes to exist; so she is placed in communion with her past and relives her first love, in Nevers. Yet she is afraid to be wholly herself, afraid to relive the suffering and madness of her years in Nevers.

Dialogue in the film is reduced to simple affirmations ("You kill me," "You do me good"). Repetitions create powerful, persistent emotions through a kind of hypnotic litany. Resnais's tracking camera, reducing the settings to mere notations, isolates the lovers in their intimacy. Sculptured by front lighting we see the couple in profile, in front face, from above, side by side, or one behind the other, exploring all the possible configurations in which their intimacy can exist. No film that I know focuses so exclusively on the intimacy of two characters or creates a relationship that is at the same time so intense yet so ambivalent. Resnais tries less than other New Wave directors to capture the casual or the contingent; rather it is the essential, the necessary that he wants to show us—he wants to isolate and set off the key moments of a relationship. Yet the emotions presented, except for two exceptions, are filtered and controlled. Only at two moments do we have raw emotions—the heroine's scream as she comes home to her parents' house after having her head shaved; her

hysteria as she sits at the café table and her lover slaps her face. Emotion is always best conveyed by suggestion and understatement; only in this way can the viewer share it. The blatant communication of emotion has a distancing effect. And Resnais is a master of indirect communication.

Hiroshima then is our paradigm of intimacy, our model of a film that presents the painful wrenching open of the self and the sharing of the most private emotions. As such it sets a standard for other New Wave films where positive emotions are expressed somewhat more typically as shot through with negativity or ambivalence. *Hiroshima* is a great affirmative film and belongs with those works, relatively few in number, that successfully communicate the ennobling and curative powers of intimacy.

Intimacy is grounded in several positive emotions, such as tenderness and desire, and may be compounded with sentiments, such as respect and concern.³ Because of the emphasis on the erotic in New Wave cinema, desire is the next primary positive emotion to consider. Desire may be the prelude to intimacy but it is shifting and fugitive and uncertain of its object. Desire is more deeply rooted in the body than in the psyche; like all bodily emotions it is selfish and egocentric, no matter how it disguises itself. Yet it is a positive force, since it leads us into contact with others: and it may be liberating, to the degree that it destroys habits and compulsions. The first type of desire, the closest to intimacy, seeks a fusional union with its object. Louis Malle's film *The Lovers*, a daring film when it was made in the mid-fifties, explores the dialectic between habit and desire and shows the salutary if destructive act of liberation that desire can produce.

The Lovers is structured by the opposition of two inauthentic relationships (between Jeanne and her husband and Jeanne and her lover, Raoul) against a new and authentic relationship, characterized not by habit and social convention but by the energetics of desire. The problem that Malle sets is to make this woman, forced into narcissism by her inauthentic relationships, open herself to the renewing force of desire; and



THE LOVERS

to do this in a way that makes her attractive to the viewer rather than merely promiscuous. This is accomplished by the cinematographic exaltation of desire in the long nighttime sequence when she strolls and boats and finally makes love with Bernard.

Desire differs from intimacy insofar as it does not include the element of knowledge and mutual revelation. Jeanne and Bernard experience each other sensually as they take their dreamlike walk through the fields and float on the stream. But they do not explore each other or know each other in any profound sense. Even the act of cunnilingus, represented here for the first time in a major feature film, remains a wholly sensual experience interpreted not by words but by the convulsive movements of Jeanne's hands and the moods of ecstasy that pass across her face. Still, knowing the body of a lover is a form of knowledge and Jeanne and Bernard reach the frontier of intimacy. Their decision to run away together contrasts with the indecision of Nevers and *Hiroshima* in Resnais's film. The decision seems lightly taken, since they know each other only erotically; but Malle's film implies a different and more superficial scale of values, one that gives a preponderant role to the satisfaction of desire. Ultimately, the film is about sexual freedom. It is the most romantic of New Wave films and shows a greater belief in the liberating power of desire than any other film of the movement.

Intimacy, and the positive emotions that generate it, is always threatened in New Wave films by negative emotions such as hatred, suspicion, and contempt. Just as positive emotions imply appetency, these negative emotions imply revulsion and the turning away of a subject from its object. There are many New Wave films concerned with the negative emotions in one form or another; yet each, no matter how negative, implies intimacy as an absent corollary.

Godard's film *Contempt*, based on Moravia's novel, deals with the growing contempt of a wife for her husband and the minute-by-minute unfolding of this empoisoned relationship. The film alternates between glowing Mediterranean exteriors and constrained interiors, where the revulsion of the wife for her husband is enacted in long sequences before the stationary camera. The emotion of contempt, with its undercurrents of hatred and bitterness, is generated through the interaction of the characters and slowly infiltrates the audience. The destruction of intimacy, the creation of strong negative currents, the desire of the wife, Camille, to pull away from her husband Paul, this is emphasized by the stasis of the interior shots and by the slow rhythm with which the film builds in intensity until Camille runs off with the American producer, Prokosch, in his red sports car. Her flight is the culmination of her growing repulsion and the final realization of the negative emotion that has dominated the film.

In Jacques Rivette's strange film, *Paris Belongs to Us*, we experience the negative emotion of fear through a host of compulsively driven characters, all moving in tight circles about each other, all trying to escape real or imagined terrors. The mood of Rivette's film has been described by Durnat as "zig-zagging from one uncertainty to another" which, together with the image of the circle, describes the shape of the film. It presents us with a group of marginal artists and intellectuals who are afflicted with the Kafkaean disease of paranoia.

The film is, on the one hand, a somewhat amateurish attempt to capture the *film noir* atmosphere of Carné and Hitchcock. There are menaces, shadows, veiled threats and mysterious



CONTEMPT

deaths. Yet the deaths are stagey and the threats abstract. One comes out of the theater remembering mainly that the heroine has been in and out of phone booths many times and has taken innumerable pointless automobile trips around Paris. Reintegrating the film in an historical ambiance that includes Kafka and Camus, the McCarthy hearings and the Kennedy assassination, one can give it provisional acceptance; yet even then, the suspense is wavering. At the end, where everything is explained rapidly, we absorb too rapidly to really care. In Kafka's world the threat is real; the hero of *The Trial* dies at the end of the book. People are liquidated in Rivette's film, but the master conspiracy out of which most of the film's atmosphere is generated proves to have been a mere aberration of one of the characters, Pierre.

The film, nonetheless, does convey a sense of fear and is the most completely negative film made by the New Wave. The kinds of repulsion suggested and their depth of feeling are conveyed by an aesthetic that carefully selects and

incarnates the negative emotions. From the emptiness and passivity of his heroine to the dry, schematic vision of Paris that he portrays (a succession of furnished rooms, streets, cars and phone-booths), Rivette proves himself expert in the art of orchestrating alienation.

Many other kinds of negative emotion could be discussed: anomie or lack of will in *The Cousins*; betrayal in *Breathless*; promiscuity in *Jules and Jim*. These are emotions or affectively tinged states that convey negative emotion; but there is no space to discuss them here.

I will conclude this section by saying a few words on the subject of *distance*, that opposite number to *intimacy* which is generated by the negative emotions.

Again and again in New Wave films characters are frustrated in the impulse that draws them together. Instead, they recoil, are forced apart, and their relationship loses itself in the fragmentation of urban life or in some form of destructive violence. Many films end in the breakdown of a relationship—*Breathless*, *Masculine Feminine*, *Jules and Jim*, *The Cousins*, etc. The characters recoil from each other or stiffen in death. The promised intimacy has not materialized, the negative forces have won out.

The New Wave always portrays life as a struggle between intimacy and distance and, in the end, distance usually triumphs. For this reason, the New Wave directors have been seen as pessimistic, as cynical and sterile. But this view is typical of the post-modern generation. It is the logical consequence of the historical themes outlined earlier: scepticism about love, downgrading of the person, explosion of the concept of self. Yet the negative approach of the New Wave is not pushed as far as it is by Beckett, Arrabal, Genet, or Burroughs.

In line with the theme of distance, an aesthetic of distance plays a prominent role in the films. Here again Godard, with his Brechtian heritage, takes the lead in introducing distancing devices into his films: shots framed by gunfire, titles, characters who turn their backs to the viewer, and the explicit renunciation of a psychological—if not an emotional—cinema are found in Godard's work. But the use of aesthetic dis-



Godard's BRITISH SOUNDS

tancing, the forcing of the spectator to become conscious and even analytical, rather than emotionally involved, is a typical feature of New Wave films. (Although at the same time a director such as Truffaut has always sought for emotional involvement by the audience with his characters. But he is the exception rather than the rule.) Rivette's *Paris Belongs to Us* discourages viewer involvement in the emotions of the characters to the extent that most audiences find it boring. Truffaut reminds us of his directorial presence by his constantly moving subjective camera, his use of narration, and his playfulness in conceiving and shooting the scenes of his films. Agnes Varda and Alain Resnais, the two most accomplished users of intimacy, also use distancing at crucial points in their films. Resnais, for example, allows the love affair in *Hiroshima* to run down, to trail off. The viewer's need for a climax is frustrated. The film ends in doubt, hesitation, analysis rather than fulfilled positive emotion. Varda too can stand back from her characters, see them at a distance, after moments of touching intimacy and revelation.

An aesthetic of distancing concerns primarily the spectator's emotional response to the film; its purpose is to force him to renounce the immediate pleasures of identification and catharsis for a more analytical and objective look at the characters. Doctrinally, of course, it comes from Brecht and his belief in art's power to

effect social change. But, in the New Wave at least, it is rooted in a general scepticism about the power and validity of emotion, a need to test emotion and subject it to the scrutiny of intelligence. Intimacy and distance are dialectically related and, between them, generate the emotional dynamic of the films.

PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

There are other forms of affectivity in New Wave films besides the easily schematized positive and negative emotions. Indeed, we have scarcely begun to touch the emotional dynamics of these films. And so rather than continue with the schematics, I feel impelled to make a radical shift, moving our study of emotion to a new plane where emotion is not immediate and direct but the subtle, evanescent accompaniment to other aspects of the films. This represents a shift, even a break in my argument; but in thus approaching emotion from a totally different angle we may grasp more readily its protean nature.

The literary critic Albert Béguin spoke of the quality of *presence* in a work, the emotional charge that accompanies the intimate awareness of a fellow consciousness or of an object. For Béguin the apex of literary art was the ability to make the reader share in the heightened reality of the Other, whether person or object, to transmit the openness of a consciousness or the "being there" of an object in such a way that its existence was shared by the reader. This sharing of existence releases a flood of affectivity, a heightened emotion which must be positive since it implies mutuality and sharing, increased awareness of one's own existence and participation in the human community.⁴

It is to Godard that we must turn if we wish to find examples of a cinema of presence (just as we will also find a cinema of absence in his work); and *Two or Three Things That I Know About Her*, his most accomplished film, is especially valuable as a source of examples.

In this film Godard claims that he has attempted to give both interior and exterior description of objects and persons:

I mean that I cannot avoid the fact that all things exist simultaneously inside and outside. For example, this can be shown by filming a building from outside, then from inside, as if one had entered a cube, an object. In the same way a person, his or her face, is generally seen from outside.

This description, as Godard carries it out in the film, communicates the sense of "presence" to the viewer and that release of emotion that accompanies it (an emotion that is both joyous and painful, negative and positive, a release and a holding back). Godard returns to the primitive cinema which makes naive use of the powerful magic of the photographic image. Simply to show an object, to transmit its color, capture the play of shadow upon it, move round it, see it from close up and from far-away is to communicate via the exploded and exploding screen image the existence of that object, the immediacy of its being there in our perceptual field, to incarnate its challenge and confrontation of us, its reciprocal evocation of our own unsupported existence.

As we see the building site which is the film's opening image—the cranes, the barge, the trucks—we are not afflicted with Sartrean nausea or Heideggerean dread but with a powerfully expanding sense of monstrosity, of size and power beyond human limits, an emotion not so much afflicting as exalting even though these are the first notes of one of the film's major themes, the theme of the violent and convulsive change taking place in the streets of Paris; and we are reminded of Baudelaire's "The Swan," a poem that resonates in powerful accord with this lyrical and tragic film.

*Old Paris is no more (the form of a city
Changes more quickly, alas, than the heart of a
man);
I see only in my mind that camp of booths,
The piles of rough-hewn capitals and shafts,
The grass, the heavy blocks turned green by the
water of pools,
And, shining on the tiles, the crowded bric-a-brac.*⁵

Like Godard's film, this poem about the old and new Paris centers upon the figure of a woman (in Baudelaire's poem Hector's wife Andromache) who is exiled amid the construc-

tion of the renovated city. Appearing then with the presentation of the City comes Juliette, the second antecedent for the Her of the title. She is seen in the banality of her clothes, the color of her hair; yet that very banality makes her vulnerable, open, for she is *present* to us in the immediacy and spontaneity of our own consciousness (this is the force of the cinematic image) and we know that she will have no secrets from us. The double vision of Juliette (interior and exterior) continues. She tells us in confidence:

What am I looking at? . . . The floor. That's all. I feel the material of the table-cloth against my hand.

Banal in their simplicity, her immediate sensations of the physical world are revealed to us; and yet it is through that simplicity that we participate in and respond emotionally to her existence. Later she speaks more profound if inchoate ideas through which her existence leaks out as if through a wound:

Shot from the thighs up of Juliette before her kitchen sink piled with household products (Tide detergent, bleach, softener). Her back towards us Juliette washes the dishes but from time to time turns her face toward the camera.

It was a typical proof of the existence of God. I was in the process of doing the dishes. I began to cry. I heard a voice which said: "You are indestructible." I, me, myself, everybody. . . .

Time is very confusing, I don't know . . . No, no definition really imposes itself. . . .

The thoughts of Juliette begin slowly to cohere, to come into focus precisely around her desire to recapture and distill an emotion, the emotion of the world's presence to her and her presence to it:

I don't know where, nor when. I only remember that it happened. It's a feeling that I searched for all day long. There was the odor of the trees. That I was the world . . . That the world was me. A landscape, it's like a face.

Throughout the film various characters meditate on the meaning of the term "reality" as does the commentator, who is Godard himself. This reality is elusive, changing, but its most precise incarnation seems to occur at the moment of



TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER

presence, as when Juliette says, "Suddenly I had the impression that I was the world and that the world was me."

The characters struggle for their existence in the city of smog and concrete, among the apartment blocks and the acres of asphalt; their own reality seems contested by the omnipresent products—cars, detergents, clothes—spewed out by the consumer society. And yet the film is not negative or wholly pessimistic; despite the oppressiveness of Juliette's life, she rises above it. She does this through an emotion, an emotion which gives her the awareness of her own reality and of the world's mutual existence with her.

Juliette, to herself. I only remember that it happened. Maybe it's not important. It was while I walked with the metro worker who was taking me to the hotel. It was a funny feeling. I've been thinking about it all day. The feeling of my connection with the world.

Juliette's entire being is centered on this effort to capture an emotion, the emotion of presence.

No matter how strong the motif of presence, however, it always includes its corollary, absence. Indeed, at times, in *Weekend* for example, absence takes precedence as the major emotion of the film.

A major statement about absence occurs in the introduction to Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*:

Starting from nothingness where thought seemed to emerge happily from a stage-set of words, writing has thus traversed all the states of a progressive solidification: at first object of a glance, then of a doing, and finally of a murder, it attains today a last

avatar, absence: in these neutral forms of writing, called here "writing degree zero," one can easily discern the very movement of a negation, and the inability to accomplish it in a duration, as if Literature, tending for a century to transmute its surface into a form without heredity, no longer found purity except in the absence of all signs, proposing at last the accomplishment of this orphean dream: a writer without Literature.

Absence, death, nothingness; these themes have been placed at the center of the exegesis of modern literature by Maurice Blanchot who is echoed here by Barthes. There is a kind of vortex at the center of the work, a delirium fastened on the experience of nothingness just as, in earlier times, the work focussed on the plenitude of God or of man's experience of his own reality. The emotions connected with absence are fear, anguish, boredom and sometimes anger—the two protagonists of *Weekend*, for example, are constantly angry at each other and at the world.

Other films beside *Weekend*, with its delirium of destructiveness, portray the theme of absence—the inability of characters to relate to a real world. In Agnes Varda's *Cleo from 5 to 7* there is the emptiness of narcissism; wherever she

looks (until she meets the soldier at the film's end), Cleo sees only her constantly reflected self and is filled with the anguish generated by that doll-like image, so empty of solidity and substance. In Rivette's *Paris Belongs to Us* the characters are motivated by compulsive drives that have no substance in reality; all their frantic comings and goings are shown to be empty of meaning. In Godard's *Two or Three Things* prostitution, that is sex in the absence of love—and, in a larger sense, the doing of work one hates for a monetary reward—is the form taken by absence. Though all the characters are searching for the reality of presence, their daily life takes the negative form of absence—absence of meaning, absence of love. Here, as in most New Wave films, absence and presence stand in a dialectical relationship to each other. There is no cinema of pure absence just as there is no cinema of pure presence. The ontological relationship of subject to object is a constantly shifting one; there is a constant struggle for the reality of existence and a constant falling away from that reality. The vaunted "ontological reality" of the photographic image celebrates both the absence and the presence of the object. It is only an image of the object that we see, the object itself is absent. In this world of shadowy images it is fitting that characters too exist and fail to exist simultaneously, reach toward us and toward each other with a grasp that is, in the last analysis, empty. Yet something has happened, an emotion and a sense of presence have been communicated; we are aware of this even as we walk out of the theater with the memory of shadows and nothing more. The cinema is a dialectical experience and the emotions it offers us arise out of the inherently paradoxical nature of our metaphysical condition.

THE EGOLOGICAL AND THE DAEMONIC

Our excursion into the study of emotion has cut into films at various angles to bare the emotional bones; but it has not yet asked the genetic question—although this was implied at the beginning, in the statement about emotion as motive force. Yet the question imposes itself: what



is the source of emotion, why does it exercise such power over us? Is it because it stems directly from the deepest springs of personality? To find the source of emotion we must resort to a psychology of depth. Jung has given a partial answer:

As a matter of fact, an emotion *is* the intrusion of an unconscious personality. The unconscious contents it brings to light have a personal character, and it is merely because we never sum them up that we have not discovered this other character long ago. To the primitive mind, a man who is seized by strong emotion is possessed by a devil or spirit; and our language still expresses the same idea, at least metaphorically.

The unconscious source of emotion is present in a number of New Wave films where we feel emotion surge forth with a power that surpasses its objective correlative, the structure of events that is meant to convey it. If the anger and revulsion of Godard's *Weekend* seem to arise normally from a series of cataclysmic events (car accidents, murder, etc.) we are nonetheless aware that those events are absurd and that Godard has presented them with an irony that undercuts them. Yet the emotions the film conveys from the directorial psyche to our own are not absurd; they have the power and spontaneity of emotions that are truly grounded in the unconscious. The mystery and bizarrerie of some of the images—Alice in Wonderland and Léaud playing the 18th-century philosopher—are also tinged with unconscious power. The film's anecdote is no more than a skeleton used by Godard to call from the depths and to orches-

trate his deepest emotions; and it is these we experience immediately and directly, rather than the somewhat arbitrary images of the film.

Truffaut's *The Bride Wore Black*, a Hitchcockian exercise in allegory, succeeds in liberating the unconscious drive for blood; although the motive is conscious—revenge—the drives behind it surge up from a hidden source deep within the character played by Jeanne Moreau. The drives give rise to a complex, an organized structure of motives that controls the character's behavior. The somewhat mechanical unfolding of the plot, in which one victim after another is massacred, echoes the mechanical unfolding of an emotional complex motivating behavior.

When I talk about the unconscious drives of a character I am using a convention; for characters exist only as portrayed. While their hidden dimensions may be implied, they cannot be hypothesized any further than those implications. So that, in the last analysis, we come to the creative mind (or minds) behind the work. A mind that, in the works of the New Wave, is likely to have more unity and independence of extraneous influences than that found in any other body of cinema. The emotions, then, refer back to their source in the *auteur's* unconscious; they are projections of his drives, his dreams, his terrors. The greater the personal stamp on the film, the more unified the unconscious syndrome. Once again it is Godard, that emotion-shy Calvinist, who carries us furthest in the direction of a cinema of the unconscious. In the great films of his middle period, before the didacticism of *Wind From the East* and the Dziga Vertov films, he improvised for us a body of work that reflected the myths of the contemporary unconscious. The dream (and catastrophic failure) of fusional love. The transcendence of the criminal. Self-abandonment and abjection. War as the personal solution. And finally, the fumble of revolution. Godard has, no doubt selectively, shown us our myths which are also his own; and his cinema stands as the image of the contemporary unconscious—violent, paradoxical, and unfulfilled.

Against emotion, which arises from the unconscious, Jung opposed *feeling*. The latter is



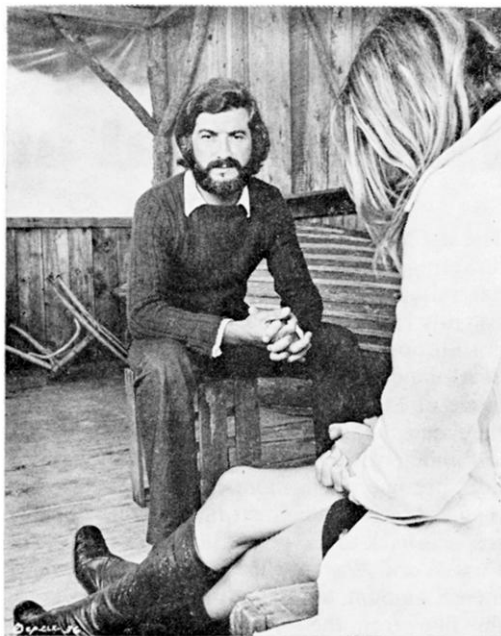
a function of consciousness and subject to ego control.

Eric Rohmer is the director who best uses feeling as opposed to emotion; who gives us a cinema where feelings are precisely orchestrated by the choices of the characters. Rohmer puts us in a moral and emotional world much like that of the 18th-century comedy of Marivaux where we are concerned with the complex nuances of feeling as characters explore their relationships with each other and move toward fleeting and tentative solutions. In Rohmer's films the characters experiment with their feelings, try them out, move toward and away from choice or commitment; the goal is the development of the self, the ego—as with the young man who wishes to touch Claire's knee; he is cultivating his *moi*, testing out new and exquisite sensations. The hero of *Chloe in the Afternoon* is drawn by his sexual fantasies, toward involvement with Chloe; yet at the end he retreats, under the impulsion of his moral sense, having realized that an affair will threaten his real self, his real life—with his wife and child.

Emotion then, is a complex, a polyvalent term. It is not localisable at any one point, nor is it to be got at by a "pointing" method—by merely saying, This is fear; this is anger; this is love; etc. Emotion appears always in flux, is dialectical by nature, and can be discussed only in terms of polarities. In the New Wave cinema, its status is especially precarious and wavering, subject to constant shifts and variations. If nothing else, I hope I have made it clear that emotion is of the essence of New Wave cinema and that an understanding of this cinema requires that we explore the nature and meaning of cinematic emotion.

NOTES

1. *Nouvelle Vague: first decade* (Essex: Motion Publications, 1963).
2. I have preferred not to give sources for the theories of emotion to which I refer. This is because I wish to emphasize the personal and spontaneous aspect of this approach to a complex and murky issue. These are



CLAIRE'S KNEE

intuitions and insights that cohere around a central core that is expressly left undefined; for emotion is an undefined concept. For those who wish to pursue the study of emotion on a more theoretical level I recommend Magda B. Arnold's *The Nature of Emotion* (Penguin, 1968) and James Hillman's *Emotion: a comprehensive phenomenology of theories and their meanings for therapy* (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962).

3. The use of the terms "emotion," "feeling," "sentiment," "mood," etc. by psychologists shows no area of common agreement. Emotion may be negative and feeling positive for one; the reverse for another, etc. I use the terms emotion and sentiment here as differing by degrees of intensity, emotion being the more intense. In addition, sentiment seems to have an intellectual and/or moral dimension.

4. For Sartre the awareness of the existence of the Other produced not joy but nausea; but this is the early Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* rather than the more serene, post-analytic Sartre of *The Words*.

5. "The Swan," translated by Wallace Fowlie. (New York: Bantam Books, 1963.)